

## 16 Conclusion

### Empowerment Revisited: Critical Reflections across Research, Policy and Practice

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#### 16.1 How it started

This book represents an overview of how we approached the concept of ‘empowerment’—and specifically related to gender—and how it is conceptualised, applied and interpreted by different actors in society. Before we delve deeper into critical reflections on the use of this concept, we will start from an anecdote that sparked interest by the first author of this concluding chapter to further examine the concept of ‘empowerment’. A couple of years ago, she was part of a European research project, together with the city of Antwerp, in collaboration with various governmental bodies, such as the social welfare organisation, the municipality and its migrant integration service. While collaborating together on the concept of ‘migrant integration’, there seems to be an emerging trend to also refer to the importance of ‘empowerment’. During informal gatherings and when conducting interviews, it appeared that all of the different governmental bodies had different approaches to ‘empowerment’ of migrant newcomers in this city. This was, for instance, shown in the emergence of follow-up trajectories that aimed to ‘measure’ the integration of newcomer migrants. These trajectories were based on the activities and progress they made in terms of enrolling in Dutch language courses, employment schemes, citizenship courses, participating in voluntary activities, education/training or employment and being able to become independent (or less dependent) from municipality services. This rather linear approach to ‘migrant integration’ was especially oriented at migrants’ own progress and did not measure initiatives of the hosting society to welcome newcomers. Thus, it reflects more the neoliberal turn in policies and social work practice, which primarily focus on fixing the individual and promoting self-optimisation, risking to place the entire responsibility on the individual while allowing institutions to ‘wash their hands of any responsibility’ when difficulties and challenges arise, rather than questioning structural conditions or the broader social order. Moreover, this ‘integration trajectory’ was approached from an idea that newcomer migrants need to become ‘empowered’ in order to participate in the new immigrant society—which was mainly interpreted in economic terms. Additionally, the concerns in this discourse on

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gender empowerment mainly seem to centre around the bodies of immigrant women who seem to be targeted as ‘in need to be empowered’, ignoring all ways they have contributed to society, the communities and neighbourhoods they were part of and the families they supported. This raised some questions about the usefulness of the concept ‘empowerment’ in the context of migrant integration, as its interpretation leaves a lot of space for misinterpretation and miscommunication between governmental and organisational bodies, and has the potential to reproduce stigmatising stereotypes in society that not necessarily hold value.

Formally linking ‘integration’ and ‘empowerment’ of migrants and migrantised groups in society together already indicates how both concepts are interpreted and conceptualised. What is even more problematic in these policy realms is that the way empowerment is embedded in research does not consider the interpretation of the people involved. When preparing for the Horizon Europe research project ReIncluGen and doing some exploratory research, more diversity emerged in the interpretation of the concept ‘empowerment’ and its relevance in everyday discourses and policy debates across Italy, Spain, Poland, Austria and Belgium. While this concept had a long tradition in Spain, in Poland policy initiatives were especially focused on reducing inequalities and centred on specific topics, such as the recent Ukrainian war and its consequences for gender-specific migration to Poland and the relevance of ‘abortion’. The ways in which empowerment emerged across countries varied in policy debates and mainstream media debates, and also had a backlash for ongoing organisations who are often subsidised by governments. In addition, many civil society organisations (CSOs) respond to ongoing debates by compensating for the ‘missing’ parts and services of policies and by including more voices in ongoing policies and policy-making.

Dominant neoliberal discourses on migration in many European societies, shaped by intersecting beliefs on integration and empowerment, suggest that individuals who are new to a society and face various obstacles are expected to overcome these barriers on their own. They are often perceived as lacking empowerment primarily because they are immigrants and/or coming from a specific cultural/religious background. Such a strict focus on the individual may also be interpreted as a strategy of diversion, shifting attention away from the broader contexts, institutional structures and the overarching patriarchal symbolic order that underpins all European societies. In this framing, the locus of responsibility for processes of inclusion and/or empowerment is rendered unmistakably clear: it is displaced onto the singular subject, rather than interrogating the systemic conditions that sustain exclusion and inequality. These ideas seem to be structurally embedded in policies, reducing all responsibilities of this process by governmental institutions and members of the immigrant society. The situation represents a double paradox: on the one hand, singular subjects are rendered fully responsible for their own integration and empowerment, and on the other hand, their agency is curtailed, as these processes are defined according to a singular, prescribed model of

what ‘successful’ integration and empowerment are deemed to entail. In this sense, individual responsibility is simultaneously inflated and hollowed out, producing what O’Reilly (2016) has described in the context of neoliberal motherhood as ‘powerless responsibility’. A similar dynamic becomes visible here, where the burden of social transformation is shifted onto individuals while the systemic conditions that perpetuate exclusion and inequality remain largely unchallenged. Hence, the concept of ‘empowerment’ should not be viewed separately from ‘agency’, which, following Mahmood (2005), is better understood as a relational and situated practice shaped by both possibilities and constraints, resonating with Bourdieu’s (1990) view of the dynamic interplay between freedom and limitation.

The previously given example of the municipality of Antwerp should be seen as only one example that focuses on the integration of migrant newcomers. However, similar discourses remain in place when it comes to descendants of migrants, already living for more than two generations in Europe, who remain to be seen as ‘migrants’ and treated as such. Whether or not they have migrated themselves, these groups in many European countries are still considered as ‘migrants’ and their actions, behaviours and preferences are still evaluated in terms of this integration discourse, namely ‘in need to adapt’ and ‘in need for empowerment’. This is why, in almost all chapters, we have chosen the term ‘migrantised’ to emphasise the socially and politically constructed nature of migrant identity. In doing so, this book aimed to highlight how individuals are positioned through institutional discourses and practices in ways that often marginalise and disempower them, rather than simply describing the act of migration itself.

While these dominant integration discourses apply for men and women, demanding to adapt to the ‘new’ immigrant society, the exact interpretation of integration discourses is often very gender-specific. As also shown in our media discourse analyses (see Chapter 7), for many men, integration is often connected to criminality, (gender-based) violence and unemployment. Many migrantised women are often regarded as victims of their traditional cultures, patriarchal political regimes or religions, resulting in their need ‘to be empowered’. This further reflects upon how societies in the Global North approach ‘gender empowerment’ and ‘agency’, which is often mainly interpreted in a liberal feminist way. In these discourses, oppressed groups are expected to ‘take matters into their own hands’. With this dominant interpretation of agency, ‘empowerment’ only gets a limited translation with regard to the reality in which migrantised women live (Mahmood, 2005; Midden & Ponzanesi, 2019). As a result, these women and their life experiences are in danger of being wrongly seen as weak or simply submissive.

The key idea of the ReIncluGen project was to address these discourses and interpretations by looking at how European CSOs approached ‘empowerment’ within their everyday practices, and how members—focusing on migrantised women—interpreted these practices and policies and how they interpreted ‘empowerment’ themselves in their past, present and future,

across different settings. To do so, we started by using a ‘situated intersectional’ approach (Anthias, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2015), in which time and place are differentiated, and the intersection of different personal characteristics, such as gender, migrant status/history, socio-economic status, age, ability and sexual orientation, was considered. This resulted firstly in reflecting on the traditions in research and everyday language use (across research settings but also across different languages and regions of origins). In this concluding chapter, we first reflect on why one needs to study empowerment and how it is perceived in current policies and civil society practices. Subsequently, we reflect on emerging ideas resulting from the different book chapters and the broader ReIncluGen project, to discuss how empowerment could be used in policy making and shape practices in CSOs. As you noted throughout the book, we incorporated contributions written by both authors working in CSOs, a technical developer and research institutions. This collaboration demonstrates the participatory and collaborative nature of this research and also aims to highlight the different perspectives, writing styles and reflections made by these different actors, shaped by their work experience and/or research findings.

## **16.2 How it is going: tracking how empowerment is situated in research, civil society and organisational practices**

We present here the findings of the separate parts of the book, starting with the chapters focusing on the concept ‘empowerment’ in theory and methods, followed by chapters on how empowerment occurs in research and civil society and concluding with how empowerment is put into practices.

### *16.2.1 The concept ‘empowerment’ in theory and methods*

As shown in part I, the concept of empowerment is intrinsically linked to power relations that are situated in the different markups of each society under study. We sketched the interlinkage between power, participation and positionality in our introduction section, which further highlighted the need to apply a situated intersectional approach to gender empowerment (Chapter 2). In the second chapter, Fleckinger explored how feminist social work practices in a women’s shelter sought to redistribute power and foster participation, highlighting both their emancipatory potential and structural limits. By introducing participatory tools such as resident-led documentation and responsibility for communal tasks, women gained more agency and opportunities for co-decision-making. Nonetheless, these practices do not reduce existing power hierarchies and relations. Within institutional settings, empowerment emerges as a relational and processual negotiation that depends on professionals’ willingness to share power. Thus, power relations remain to play a role in the case of migrantised women, as there seem to be boundaries to the level of empowerment people are allowed to become. As the chapter

illustrates, empowerment in feminist social work is not a fixed outcome but a continuous negotiation of power, where small participatory practices can challenge hierarchies, provoke resistance and ultimately foster lasting cultural change in institutional settings.

Many CSOs and policy domains also focus on specific social domains, and these are thus specialised organisations. The intersection between ‘empowerment’ and inclusion therefore also differs clearly across social domains. Hence, this requires the need for using a situated intersectional lens. More specifically, as shown in [Chapter 4](#), by Narciso and Reyes, policy discourses often frame the empowerment of migrantised women and girls in utilitarian terms, particularly in the economic domain, where it is conceived as a means to foster integration and development rather than as an end in itself. This framing reinforces distorted representations of women and girls as a homogeneous and passive collective.

However, the chapter goes further by examining how CSOs in five EU countries understand and enact empowerment, and by foregrounding the perspectives of the women and girls themselves. Their narratives reveal empowerment as an ongoing, multidimensional and relational process, rooted in autonomy, rights, resilience and collective support. In this way, the chapter contributes a counter-narrative that challenges hegemonic discourses.

These insights additionally call to rethink current research practices and methodologies. This is certainly the case as research practices may also reflect biases in society and in terms of conceptualisations of empowerment. For a large part of the data collection of the ReIncluGen project, photo-eliciting methods were used to gauge definitions and ask participants to reflect upon what ‘gender empowerment’ means for them. However, more arts-based research practices or co-creative research methods could be applied, especially when conducting research with migrants (see also [Van Praag, 2021](#)). In [Chapter 5](#), Rezanezhad and Miri proposed art-based research methods as a critical response to these neoliberal biases, considering researcher positionalities and interpretations of empowerment. As shown by these authors, artistic research and practice can be grounded in participants’ existing knowledge and skills, rather than extracting information and rearticulating it through researcher-authorised representations that reinforce hierarchical power relations. Additionally, arts-based methods can be used, such as showing documentary films, not merely as a means of representation but as a tool for reconsidering perspectives and generating diverse avenues for new insights and investigations.

### *16.2.2 Empowerment in research and civil society*

In the second part of the book, we focused on the study of situated attitudes, discourses and implementation of gender empowerment in Europe. We saw that power hierarchies and relations further shape (implicit) views on diversity, empowerment and inclusion endorsed in research, policy documents,

media reporting and organisational practices. In [Chapter 6](#), Cvajner and Odasso provided a comparative study of gender attitudes in Europe. This chapter further examines whether the presence of migrants and their descendants—often still categorised as ‘migrants’ and portrayed in public discourse as holding traditional views on gender roles—affects these dynamics. The authors provided a first overview across Europe, before delving into the Italian case. Important to note is that these graphs and information about gender attitudes, based on European comparable datasets, often have high value for policy makers and provide a tool to further develop policies. The authors find that age at arrival of migrants, in combination with the Italian societal norms, further shapes gender attitudes. This demonstrates the interaction between region of origin and region of arrival in shaping gender attitudes and highlights that migrant integration processes should not be understood as linear trajectories resting solely on the responsibility of migrants; rather, the importance of the situated intersectional lens, with its focus on translocality, becomes evident. Additionally, when reflecting on gender norms and attitudes in society, it should be noted that there is no clear ‘goal’ of what migrantised women and societies should be heading to. In many cases, reducing gender inequalities is seen as a goal, searching for equal participation rates in all life spheres in society. By failing to acknowledge the lack of clear definition and objective, it is also easy to use and abuse this kind of analysis to further exclude specific groups or reinforce stereotypes in society that combine gender and migration.

Views and discourses on empowerment and inclusion, reflect and stress the barriers people are confronted with in societies, and opportunities given. When looking at these different gender attitudes across settings ([Chapter 6](#)), we need to acknowledge the context in which these attitudes are shaped and in which the exclusionary practices occur. It is also in these contexts that CSOs navigate and function. This brings us to many of the other chapters, which focus not only on the opportunities available to people but also on the mechanisms of exclusion in society and how these shape experiences of exclusion and empowerment.

We noted that there are more forces in society that continuously contribute to a specific portrayal of migrantised women and girls in society, this time in media discourses. Again, this portrayal depends on the specific social domain and topic discussed. In [Chapter 7](#), Ou-Salah, Fransen and Van Praag studied the ways in which migrantised women were portrayed in media discourses, in the Netherlands and Belgium. Again, these debates followed larger societal policy debates in each of the respective countries. The absence of references to migrantised women, their active voices in the media and the framing by experts varied per media outlet and per topic. What was striking is that, between more popular and more expert media sources, gender stereotypes were not always clearly reproduced in the actual articles, but were present in agenda-setting, essays by public figures and in the ways individual experiences and accounts found their way into the media.

Within CSOs, it is important to reflect on ongoing power dynamics and hierarchies in patriarchal societies, as well as on their institutional landscape and relationship with the government. Here the composition of CSOs and the contexts in which they operate are also highly relevant. As shown by [Chapter 8](#), by Klaver, Van Praag and Miri, power relations that are present in society further make up the composition of CSOs and shape diversity objectives and rationales in organisations. This is reflected in practices and organisational activities. Reflexivity in—often small scale—CSOs is often hard to realise without taking the time to see yourself and your organisation as outsider and/or to evaluate one's positions and activities in safe spaces. Hence, one's personal affinity and experiences with specific groups in society, as well as exclusion and precarities, can be relevant to further developing inclusionary practices in one's organisation.

Going beyond power dynamics within CSOs, we need to situate these dynamics in the broader institutionalisation of civil society and the broader bureaucratic requirements and neoliberal logics. To understand how exclusion works across societies, it was interesting to examine the civil society landscape as units of analysis to further understand how they respond to structural ways of exclusion in society and focus on specific target groups. Nonetheless, this also demanded attention to the broader contexts in which CSOs work and the level of institutionalisation. In [Chapter 9](#), Szczepańska and Siemieńska-Żochowska discussed how in Poland CSOs interact with migrant and migrantised individuals' identities within the specific context of an ongoing war and the process of non-governmental organisation (NGO) institutionalisation. Their findings indicate that the institutionalisation of civil society results in greater stability and professionalisation of civil society actors, but at the same time immediately impacts their functioning and ways of responding to urgent needs in society and the boundaries set by funding agents. This, in turn, can impact power relations and endorse specific views on migrantised and migrant women and girls in society that do not always recognise their empowerment, their added value in society or the specific needs and barriers they are confronted with.

### 16.3 Empowerment put into practice

In the third part of the book, the contributions further discuss and examine practices that foster empowerment and inclusion in Europe. The need for nuance and understanding of multifactorial vulnerabilities within organisations is discussed in depth by Balistieri and Fabbro in [Chapter 10](#). The combination of facing vulnerabilities and barriers at various levels and in different life spheres also complicates providing support that considers all these vulnerabilities. Instead of portraying people in terms of these vulnerabilities that often result in additional stress and feelings of shame, this chapter shows the need for even more specialised and targeted social services to tackle these vulnerabilities, which are accompanied by complex socio-economic conditions,

cultural and linguistic barriers, and experiences of discrimination. In doing so, there is a constant need to counter gendered stereotypes—and even more so in the case of migrantised women. Using the case of one organisation, of which the authors are part of, the authors demonstrate that women often-times do not only need support from organisations as theirs but also need to build a social supportive network that helps to reduce the dependence on CSOs, resulting in a more continuous line of support.

In [Chapter 11](#), Alfagame and colleagues use education as an interesting setting to understand how using an intersectional lens by school actors can further help to situate students and teachers in broader societal structures, shaping experiences of privilege and exclusion. One crucial practice they put to the fore is to co-create education to dismantle existing power hierarchies present in many settings and institutions. Through this practice, the organisation realised that they had to approach gender in a very diverse way, moving away from a binary understanding, and instead recognising that applying a gender dichotomy does not suffice in capturing all disadvantages, inequalities and ways of exclusion in education, and, by extension, in society. Especially dismantling structural racism and the use of existing categories (e.g., people of migrant descent) is hard, exactly as people are socialised within this system. This demands to understand and develop practices that deal with exclusion and how it is reinforced in everyday discourses and practices.

As shown in part I, the use of arts-based methods could support the empowerment of both participants and researchers—but also serve as a tool to exactly discuss, dismantle and interpret these broader societal structures that result in exclusion and remain insufficiently identified. In [Chapter 12](#), by Açkaoglu, Miri and El Fikri, the authors examine how theatre is used as a tool to deconstruct existing assumptions and further reflect on one's own position in society and ways forward. For instance, Empact vzw initiated a theatre project to introduce migrantised women to storytelling as a means of expressing and processing migration-related experiences and trauma. By developing theatre skills in a supportive, confidential space, participants were empowered to confront their pasts, explore complex emotions and embrace new forms of self-expression. In [Chapter 13](#), art therapy is presented through a range of examples as both a method of social intervention and a tool for empowerment, well-being and integration. It is also shown as a means of raising awareness of migrant women's rights in order to generate social impact. At the same time, art therapy contributes to community-building while responding to individual needs for safety, belonging and personal growth. By fostering creativity and self-expression in supportive environments, these initiatives not only strengthen individual resilience but also promote collective agency, making art therapy a multidimensional practice situated at the intersection of care, empowerment and social transformation. Subsequently, Deneva and Häckel, in [Chapter 14](#), studied how empowerment is supported and interpreted in different CSOs in Austria, part of the same policy framework that too frequently reduces empowerment to employability and language

acquisition. Their analyses showed that CSOs go beyond these policy frameworks and strive to foster more holistic, participant-centred approaches grounded in feminist and intersectional values. Nonetheless, this does not occur within a social vacuum. The authors found that staff members still have to operate within a persistent double bind, in which they have to ‘empower’ participants but at the same time have to conform to neoliberal funding priorities. Interestingly, when taking on the perspective of migrantised women who are part of these CSOs, the understanding of empowerment consists of a continuous process of everyday acts of autonomy and independence. This chapter demonstrates the contradictions that prevail in social work and are certainly also applicable when focusing on the intersection between empowerment and migrant integration. Finally, in [Chapter 15](#), by Aerts, the development of EFIKO is discussed as a start-up to develop the QUWA digital tool in a later stage of the project. Again, a co-creative approach is proposed as a common practice of Kunlabora to develop digital tools. This ensures that a tool is developed according to the needs of the organisations that will use the developed digital tools.

#### **16.4 How to proceed: recommendations for future policies and practices**

This book demonstrates how empowerment and inclusion often intersect, and its intersection often contains very specific interpretations, depending on the life sphere, country context and positionality. Using the concept of ‘empowerment’ often evokes an applause when used in policy circles or in delivering policy goals and electoral campaigns, emphasising neoliberal ideals and objectives and assuming a distinction between those who are empowered and those who are not (see [Miri, Van Praag, & Klaver, 2025](#)). Also starting from the experiences of the migrantised and migrant women and girls who participated in this research, one noted that the concept ‘empowerment’ contains so many diverse interpretations that are often reflecting existing structural opportunities in society and the barriers people are confronted with. As we are confronted with more neoliberal understandings of the concept ‘empowerment’ that shapes policy, civil society practices and research, the accounts of this group of women to whom this concept is often applied even calls for more question marks to its usage in official research and policy documents. Using narratives and beliefs on what it means ‘to be’ or ‘to feel empowered’ in society reveals a lot of information about existing structures, ambitions, imaginaries and barriers, which makes it not the best concept to operationalise. Moreover, the distinct interpretations across genders, ethnicities, migrant and migrantised groups and racialised groups across societies, often intertwined with specific discourses on integration, may even further blur and weaken the conceptual usage of this term.

The findings of this book bring us to the following policy suggestions, research and civil society practices. First, policy makers, scholars and civil

society actors need to align conceptualisations and understandings of ‘empowerment’ before implementing policies and practices. The lack of having a common idea and conceptualisation of ‘empowerment’ and ‘integration’ in policy and CSOs working on these topics is problematic. This could give way to unclarity for the target group, include biases and assumptions that do not necessarily hold value and work counterproductive for the further development of additional practices to support empowerment in organisations. Or, stated differently, given the multiple interpretations this concept can carry, it is essential to clarify its purpose and highlight its situated, dynamic nature before it can effectively function as a tool or guiding principle for shaping practices and activities.

Second, policy makers and CSOs could apply a situated intersectional lens (Anthias, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2015) into practice and policies, and give attention to existing power relations and hierarchies. While there are multiple ways to approach this, it is important to recognise the intersecting dimensions of individuals’ identities and social positions. Moreover, it is important to consider how these intersecting dimensions shape individuals’ experiences of inequality, opportunities and vulnerabilities, and how this relates to specific historical contexts or ‘transtemporality’ (e.g., colonial legacies, generational trauma, past policies), geographical spheres or ‘translocality’ (e.g., home, diaspora, migration routes, institutions) and different societal levels of analysis or ‘transcality’ (e.g., personal or intimate to relational and institutional level). A situated intersectional approach demands attentiveness not only to the contextual realities and needs of those involved but also to their agency, resistance and capacity for self-definition, in this case, of migrantised women. This is crucial to avoid reproducing paternalistic or victimising narratives that frame individuals solely through their vulnerabilities, rather than acknowledging them as active agents navigating, challenging and negotiating structural constraints. The ways these intersectional approaches can be implemented in practice can vary. For instance, some organisations prefer a relationship-based approach to better capture the entanglement of needs, barriers and support required to recover from more severe hardships and be part of society.

A third recommendation is related to incorporating arts-based practices and research methods in policy, research and CSO practices. Arts-based practices and approaches have in common that they stimulate agency, active reflection, participation and engagement about the topic. However, not all arts-based practices may be suited for all issues. For instance, theatre play may be relevant to work on stigmas, very sensitive topics or traumas, for persons with similar lived experiences or ‘intersectional wounds’. Using theatre play requires intense collaboration with a smaller group of people in safe(r) spaces and careful guidance. Art-based practices and approaches could also foster intercultural communication but may also not suit everyone. Not everyone likes to engage in theatre for a longer period of time or share intimate moments via photos. Photo-eliciting techniques may be relevant when

researchers have time for several moments to introduce the topic in a first interview, and later follow-up on the process of taking photos and discuss their meaning. The use of documentaries or short films or small improvisation theatre plays may be more appropriate for workshops or when participants do not wish to or cannot engage for a longer period of time. The preconditions in which arts-based approaches excel is also 'situated' and as such may differ across groups, topics, target groups and settings.

A fourth recommendation focuses on recognising the importance of a stress- and trauma-sensitive approach in both professional practice and research with vulnerable groups. Individuals who have experienced marginalisation, violence or other forms of adversity may respond to research and intervention processes in ways shaped by past trauma. Practitioners and researchers therefore carry a responsibility to act with awareness, sensitivity and care in order to avoid retraumatisation, foster trust and create safer spaces for participation. This requires not only methodological adaptations but also critical engagement with power dynamics, communication styles and ethical responsibilities that underpin encounters with vulnerable participants (Van Praag et al., 2025).

Importantly, such an approach should not be conceived as a one-directional duty towards research participants or clients. Stress and trauma sensitivity also functions as a protective measure for practitioners and researchers themselves. Engaging closely with experiences of violence, exclusion or suffering can generate secondary trauma, emotional overload and professional burnout if appropriate safeguards are absent. Embedding reflective practices, supervision and collective responsibility into professional and academic contexts can help mitigate these risks. In this sense, trauma-sensitive practice must be understood as a reciprocal process, ensuring the well-being of all parties involved while strengthening the ethical and sustainable foundations of research and social intervention.

Finally, using co-creative methods can help to design tools that support exchange and sharing of practices within civil society, or support in responding to existing needs of organisations or individuals. However, the conditions in which these co-creative sessions and methods should occur are very relevant, especially given the unequal power hierarchies and relations in society and organisations. The experiences of Kunlabora, as shown in [Chapter 13](#), may be useful tools to reflect on how to co-develop tools. However, every situation and collaboration needs to constantly monitor whether all participants are treated equally and feel treated as such, and how conditions to create safe(r) spaces need to be organised.

To conclude this book, we foremost like to thank all participants, co-creators, collaborators, photographers, policy makers, professionals and CSOs who engaged in this research project and helped to realise this book. We also wish to extend our sincere thanks to our academic advisory boards and CSO board members for their invaluable guidance, feedback and support throughout the project. We are very grateful to have learnt and experienced many

forms of empowerment and agency of people involved. We wish to stress the diversity in views on empowerment, and how this changes across people's lives, the contexts and geographic regions they found themselves in and with whom they were surrounded and supported.

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